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ABSTRACT

Three graduate deans at large state supported universities (University of Oklahoma, University of Washington, and University of Louisville, Kentucky) who are heavily involved in both graduate education and research administration examine trends in higher education as applied to their roles. Areas in which the role of the graduate dean has changed considerably in recent years include: increased interaction with for-profit firms, growth of "nontraditional" programs, growth of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary centers, graduate recruitment, university and economic development and diversification, and involvement in fundraising. It is concluded that overall, the graduate dean is experiencing a decrease in personal involvement with graduate students and faculty and an increase in interaction with the graduate research arena and the world outside the university. (DB)

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# The Changing Role of the Graduate Dean

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# The Changing Role of the Graduate Dean

*Last year the Board of Directors of CGS considered a number of issues relating to the changing role of the graduate dean. One paper that emerged from those discussions is presented here. It is by three deans who have research responsibilities as well as graduate dean responsibilities at their institutions.*

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**Gene Woodruff, University of Washington**
**X. J. Musacchia, University of Louisville**

Describing the changing role of the graduate dean has proved to be a challenging experience. The role of graduate dean varies enormously across institutions, and describing something in the process of change is difficult at best. We are also appreciative of the variations in our perspectives when describing an administrative role at the national level. This article is a composite of the work of three graduate deans, all of whom are at large state-supported universities that are involved heavily in graduate education at both the master's and doctoral levels. In addition, each of the deans is also greatly involved in research administration. it is clear that graduate deans in other situations may well have very different perceptions, and, in fact, concerns expressed in this article are not necessarily shared by the three of us. The following areas are among those in which the role of the graduate dean appears to us to have changed considerably.

**I. Increased interaction with for-profit firms.**

There has been a significant increase in the past several years in the amount of interaction between universities and the business and industrial sector. At the University of Washington, for example, industry-sponsored research has increased in the last four years from $6 million per year to $15 million per year. The percentage of the total grant and contract research represented by industry increased in that period from 3.6% to 5.9%. An increase of at least this magnitude is reflected on many of our university campuses.

Many reasons exist for this increased interaction, among the most notable being that universities have become concerned that federal research support would decrease. It is appropriate to note that the decrease in federal research funding has not yet occurred but the concern is legitimate and could be realized at any time. In addition, U.S. companies have become alarmed about the competitiveness of their products in the international market place and are more aware of the importance of universities to both regional and national economies. It is also clear that in some new fields of research, such as genetic engineering, computer science, and computer engineering, the pathway from discovery to commercial profits can be very direct and relatively short.

The magnitude of the increase is in no sense proportionate to the increase in time and effort which must be dedicated to this area. The changes that the increase necessitiates are not entirely new but require an evergrowing share of the deans' time and energies. Significant progress has been made over the past years in developing a more or less common set of rules and regulations for working with federal agencies. No such shared set of rules and regulations exists with regard to the private sector and each new contract must be negotiated with the company or business involved. Many of these companies have minimal experience working with universities, and negotiating with each one individually requires large amounts of time.

One of the most fundamental tenets of the academy is that the results of research and scholarship must be made freely available to the benefit of all. This belief can be inconsistent with the interests of an industrial sponsor of university research. In the case of the federal government, restrictions take the form of classified information, and the analogous form for industry is proprietary information. Universities reach very differently to these two types of restrictions on publication. The results from a recent survey of AAU institutions showed that only seven of forty-two responding would allow pre-publication reviews of federally sponsored research. All but one of these same forty-two institutions, however, allowed pre-publication review by industry sponsors. It should be noted, however, that the object of prepublication review by industry is predominantly to determine whether or not patent application should be filed. These reviews, therefore, most often involve delays rather than prohibitions of publication.

*(continued on page 2)*

## Inside

Linney discusses appropriations . . . . . 3
Annual meeting . . . . . 5
Off-Campus Graduate Education Policy Statement available . . . . . 5
Department of Education Grant application dates . . . . . 6
Opportunities for support . . . . . 7

## Graduate Dean's Role

*(continued from page 1)*

The participation of graduate students in privately-, i.e. industry-sponsored research can involve very difficult questions which must be addressed by the graduate dean. For example, should graduate students be exposed to proprietary information in the course of their research? If so, who determines whether the thesis or dissertation contains proprietary information? What happens if the student fails to keep such information confidential? What are the rights of a graduate student when a patent results from his or her research? What if student progress toward the degree conflicts with the interests of the sponsoring company? Should the thesis or dissertation be delayed while a patent application is filed, and if so, for how long?

The potential for conflicts of interest can be very great when faculty members have a financial interest in the company that sponsors research related to their interest. These conflicts of interest can be associated with work performed either on or off campus. Should faculty members have the right to use university research equipment when such use is paid for by a for-profit firm in which the faculty member has an interest? Should such equipment be available only to selected faculty members or is it to be made available to other faculty who have the same needs and desires? What is to happen if a company "captures" a whole field of research within the university? Should this be prevented, and if so, how? What if a faculty member working with a company makes a discovery that simultaneously opens up new research opportunities for faculty colleagues and also gives the company a significant commercial advantage. Is the faculty member obligated to inform his or her colleagues about this? How soon? Suppose a graduate student is sponsored by a company in which the faculty advisor has an interest; how are the student's interests protected? Who insures that the direction of the work is motivated by progress toward the degree rather than a potential advantage for the company? Should a company which contributes heavily toward a university's major fund drive be given any special consideration in the decision to award an exclusive license on a patent? Should state-supported universities provide in-state firms with special consideration over those at the national or international level? What should the university's couse of action be if it is convinced that a company has violated the terms of a contract with the university? Should the university go to court to protect its interests?

The airing of these issues tends to cast a negative quality on the entire spectrum of industry/university interaction and it is important to retain an appropriate perspective. There is a strong consensus that an increased level of such interaction is a healthy trend for our society. What is important is that graduate deans play a central role in maintaining the wholesomeness of this relationship. It is also clear that the problems described are not in any sense exhaustive but merely illustrative of the problems which can occur in this general arena and which require the active involvement of the graduate dean. The time required to deal with these issues is very significant and clearly the occasion for a major change in the role of the graduate dean.

## Graduate Dean's Role

*(continued from page 2)*

**IV. Graduate recruitment.**

The demographics on the national scene reflect a continued diminution in the number of traditional students we are likely to be able to attract to graduate programs. This trend is compensated for in part by the growth in international students and part-time students, but there is every indication that competition for outstanding new domestic graduate students will increase in the years ahead. In addition, our universities must find more effective ways to increase the number of minorities and women in fields in which they are underrepresented in our graduate programs. The problem with regard to underrepresented minorities and women is especially vexing in the case of science and engineering. Though typically graduate deans do not recruit students to their graduate programs, they must find ways by which to increase the effectiveness of the departments and faculty in these areas. Graduate deans will have to find ways to be facilitators of recruitment of graduate students if we are to meet the needs for a strong, balanced academic and professional work force in the next century.

A companion problem we face in many of our graduate programs is the enormous attrition rate. In many of our doctoral programs far less than fifty percent of those admitted complete the program. In the majority of cases the factors responsible are non-academic. The waste of human potential and educational resources must be diminished. We are not suggesting that the education provided is not of value unless a degree is awarded but rather that the failure to complete degree requirements frequently prevents the indi-

*(continued on page 6)*

## Graduate Dean's Role

*(continued from page 4)*

vidual from working in the field.

**V. The university and economic development and diversification.**

State governments in many areas are looking increasingly to their state universities for assistance in enhancing the economic development and industrial diversification of the state. The number of states with programs to facilitate economic development through technology transfer is impressive and growing. The role of the university is not always well understood by the individuals who are looking to the university for its help in these endeavors. State administrators frequently appoint advisory boards, commissions, and task forces with strong representation from business and industry in order to aid and assist the state in these efforts. In many instances the subsequent support of research on university campuses is provided neither to enhance the quality of education for our students nor for the development of new knowledge, but rather to aid and assist work which will help business and industries within the state.

*(continued on page 8)*

## Graduate Dean's Role

*(continued from page 6)*

There is no question that universities can and should be a very positive force in economic development. It is clear we must do a better job than we have in the past in transferring the technology developed in our laboratories to the private sector. The problems in doing so are complex and well beyond the scope of this paper. The point, however, is that the role of the graduate dean is changing as these new pressures grow. The amount of time spent working with state boards and the legislature has increased enormously for many graduate deans at state universities in the past five years.

**VI. Involvement in fundraising.**

Graduate deans are becoming involved increasingly in fundraising activities. Such activities have not been uncommon on private university campuses but the involvement of the graduate dean in such activities at state universities is a likely new development. Several graduate deans have had notable success in their efforts in this arena. Working with donors is an exciting new challenge but clearly not an area without its liabilities as well as benefits. Many of us are experiencing for the first time the uncomfortable position of having to explain to a major donor why his or her child or that of a friend cannot be accepted into a graduate program or why faculty can't be directed to perform research on a topic of interest to the donor. It is not completely clear whether this is a temporary change or a significant change in role. The chances are, however, that this is a basic change in one facet of the life of a graduate dean. It seems unlikely that tuition, state and federal funding by themselves will enable us to provide the quality of education we hope to provide our students.

The role of the graduate dean is still one of the most exciting and rewarding on the university campus. The changes we face are not all positive. The rewards of working with graduate students and faculty members are increasingly being delegated to assistant and associate deans. Many of us miss the personal relationships which such involvement made possible. We deal increasingly with issues that are focused on an interaction of the graduate research arena with the world outside the university. How we adapt to this changing role should be an ongoing concern of the Council of Graduate Schools. One of the primary objectives of the summer workshops, annual meetings, and publications of the Council of Graduate Schools should be to assist us as we move to meet these challenges. ●

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